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Smyth, Eddie; Vanclay, Frank

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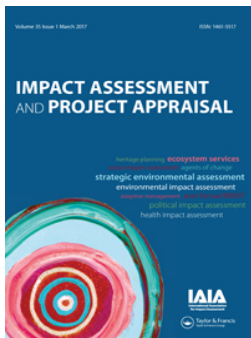
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# The Social Framework for Projects: a conceptual but practical model to assist in assessing, planning and managing the social impacts of projects

Eddie Smyth<sup>a</sup>  and Frank Vanclay<sup>b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Intersocial Consulting, Monasterevin, Ireland; <sup>b</sup>Faculty of Spatial Sciences, Department of Cultural Geography, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

## ABSTRACT

The Social Framework for Projects assists in understanding, assessing, planning and managing the social issues associated with big projects, such as those leading to the resettlement or displacement of people. The Framework was iteratively developed by assessing existing models (e.g. Sustainable Livelihoods Approach of the UK Department for International Development; the Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction model of Michael Cernea; the Capability Approach of Amartya Sen; Asset Based Community Development and other capitals-based approaches), reflecting on our practical experience in large projects, and on the basis of input and feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. It was designed to be compatible with the International Finance Corporation's environmental and social performance standards and international best practice. It consists of 8 key social and environmental categories which address all the issues that contribute to people's well-being and the social sustainability of projects, namely: people's capacities, abilities and freedoms to achieve their goals; community/social supports and political context; livelihood assets and activities; culture and religion; infrastructure and services; housing and business structures; land and natural resources; and the living environment. The Framework is a conceptual model, a practical methodology and a communications tool to ensure that the process of mitigating negative social impacts and enhancing the benefits of large projects is effective and accessible to all stakeholders.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

The world's population is predicted to grow from its current 7 billion to 8.5 billion by 2030, to 9.7 billion by 2050, and to exceed 11 billion in 2100 (UN-DESA 2015). This growth is driven by high fertility rates in the poorest developing countries and by a globally increasing life expectancy (UN-DESA 2015). In 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with ambitious targets to eliminate extreme poverty and hunger, take action on climate change, provide sustainable cities and communities with affordable, clean energy and infrastructure while maintaining ecosystems and ensuring good health and well-being for all (UN 2015). Achieving these targets will be a significant challenge given there are over 700 million people living in extreme poverty, concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia (Cruz et al. 2015). This population growth and the commitment to fight poverty will drive a strong demand for more food, more housing and more services, which will require new and expanding cities, and a massive expansion in the number of large projects for energy, infrastructure, mining, agriculture and real estate development. Ironically, these large projects,

which are typically seen as being solutions to problems, will themselves be the source of considerable social impacts, both negative and positive, including through the displacement and resettlement of large numbers of people.

There is much evidence that the majority of people displaced by large projects experience reduced well-being (Cernea 2003; Scudder 2011). Large projects are often justified as being 'in the national interest' (Hanna et al. 2014), but as Cernea (2000:12) argued, 'the outcome is an unjustifiable repartition of development's costs and benefits; some people enjoy the gains of development, while others bear its pains'. In many places around the world, it seems that the impoverishment of impacted communities is seen as acceptable 'collateral damage' in order to develop projects deemed to be in the national interest (Mathur 2011, 2013). The World Bank, whose mission is to end extreme poverty, has acknowledged that there are shortcomings in the resettlement of communities associated with the projects it has funded, and it has promised to do better (World Bank 2015). The challenge, therefore, is to consider how to develop large projects in poor countries with rapidly expanding populations, while enhancing the livelihoods of local communities.

**CONTACT** Eddie Smyth  eddiesmyth@intersocialconsulting.com

Ensuring that these projects have the support of affected peoples (a social licence to operate) is important (Jijelava & Vanclay 2014a, 2014b), else these projects will be met with opposition and resistance (Hanna, Langdon et al. 2016; Hanna, Vanclay et al. 2016) that will be detrimental to the development goals they are trying to achieve. Several frameworks have been developed to assist in this task, most notably the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) (discussed below), but none are routinely used in Social Impact Assessment (SIA) practice (Kirchherr & Charles 2016).

This paper considers how large projects can be better planned and managed to reduce their negative social consequences, to improve people's well-being, and gain a social licence to operate. Written by an experienced social practitioner together with an applied academic, it reflects on a broad range of practical experiences with large resource projects that have required significant resettlement of people. Building on a review of the available frameworks that are sometimes used by practitioners to identify social impacts and mitigation measures, we propose a new conceptual framework and tool, the *Social Framework for Projects*, that is highly applicable to planning, assessing and managing the social impacts of large projects. Our Social Framework provides both a conceptual basis for understanding how projects impact on people's well-being and a practical methodology for understanding negative impacts and maximizing positive outcomes.

Our paper is structured by discussing the criteria or conditions that would need to be considered in the development of a new framework intended to be more effective in the social management of large projects: (1) the framework must build on the key ideas and models already in existence; (2) it must be human rights compatible and lead to enhanced awareness of human rights; (3) it must be compatible with the international standards and best practice that operate in the professional space; (4) it must assist in achieving widely desired social goals; and (5) it must be participatory and practical.

### **Criterion 1: Build on key ideas and existing frameworks**

Many frameworks which potentially could inform current practice and thinking in the management of social impacts have been developed by various scholars and practitioners (Owen & Kemp 2012; Wörsdörfer 2014; Kabra 2016). Some of these – notably the ideas of AK Sen, Cernea's Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) framework, the SLA, and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) (all described below) – have been much cited and are influential in various ways. However, in our professional experience, social performance practitioners generally don't use these frameworks to support their practice, because they are not particularly useful in practical application and/or because of their

complexity and excessive use of jargon. Instead, practitioners tend to utilize a range of bespoke tools and/or lists of themes to capture the social issues. These may be commercial-in-confidence and are typically not subject to rigorous review. We feel there is some merit in the leading frameworks we identify, but we argue that they need to be much adapted to be easily applied to real life situations of actual projects.

Below, we provide an overview and critique of the established conceptual models in the development discourse. Our Social Framework was developed partly from our practice in the field (Vanclay 2002; ICM 2015; Reddy et al. 2015; Smyth et al. 2015; Vanclay et al. 2015) and by reflecting on the positive and negative elements of these pre-existing frameworks.

### **Sen's entitlement theory and capability approach**

The Nobel Prize-winning economist, Amartya Sen, has had considerable influence in moving development thinking and welfare economics away from income-based measures to focusing on people's ability to achieve what they value. In his influential book, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Sen (1981) argued that famine occurs not because of a lack of food, but from inequalities built into the mechanisms for producing and distributing food. He proposed a Capability Approach (Sen 1985, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2004, 2005) arguing that there should be a greater focus on enabling people to achieve their full potential, i.e. what a person is capable of doing and being. However, he acknowledged that people differ in their capability to develop their livelihoods fully, due to various personal and locational factors and social arrangements. He defined poverty as deprivation in (or rather restriction on) the capability to live a good life, while development is seen as the expansion of capabilities (Sen 1999). The Capability Approach evaluates policies according to their likely impact on people's capabilities, and covers all dimensions of human well-being, for example, asking whether people have access to a high-quality education, to real political participation, and to community activities that support them in coping with the struggles of daily life and in fostering real relationships (Robeyns 2003). Sen emphasized that quality of life needs to be seen in terms of the capability and freedom of people to have choice, and to be able to perform a range of activities such as being able to cope with stress and shocks, and being able to respond to adverse changes in conditions.

Sen (2004, p. 77) did not provide clear practical guidelines to practitioners or researchers on how to assess or identify capabilities, arguing that being prescriptive would 'deny the possibility of fruitful public participation on what should be included and why'. However, Alkire (2002a) demonstrated how Sen's approach can be implemented in practice. Other researchers, notably Nussbaum (2003), considered that Sen's perspective of

freedom was too vague and that some freedoms necessarily need to be restricted – for example, gender justice cannot be successfully pursued without limiting male freedom. Nussbaum endorsed a specific list of central human capabilities, including life, bodily health, emotions and play. Others, including Robeyns (2003), have defended Sen, although adding that a list of capabilities must be context dependent.

Sen's work directly influenced the development of the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Alkire (2010) explained that there has not been a fixed list of dimensions of human development in the HDI, a position supported by Sen, as it allowed human development to be determined as appropriate in each cultural and national context. Alkire explained that dissatisfaction with the adequacy of GDP and economic growth rates as metrics of well-being is rising because these measures do not consider a range of issues such as equity, instability, and other economic externalities such as the burden on the earth's resources. Furthermore,

people often value achievements that do not show up immediately or at all in high income and growth figures: health; knowledge; livelihoods; relationships; safety; art and culture; happiness, self-direction; and political freedoms. Naturally people want good incomes and work hard to obtain them. But income is not the sum total of human life. (Alkire 2010, p. 38)

In our view, Sen has provided an interesting theoretical framework that addresses key issues in development thinking. However, his framework is, in effect, a set of general principles, and it lacks a mechanism for its implementation in projects. Our Social Framework has been influenced by Sen's approach, but goes further in that we have presented a model that can be easily operationalized in projects.

### **Cernea's IRR framework**

Perhaps the best known model for planning and managing the impacts of resettlement is the IRR Framework of Michael Cernea (1997). As an indication of the significance of this framework, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standard 5 on Land Acquisition in Involuntary Resettlement (IFC 2012a) uses it to identify the main resettlement risks. The IRR model is based on the evidence that resettlement has caused the impoverishment of impacted communities in the majority of cases, therefore the focus of social management should be on identifying the risks up-front and developing measures to minimize those impacts (Cernea 2000; Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau 2006).

The risks and their accompanying mitigations that comprise the IRR are (Cernea 2000, p. 20):

- From landlessness to land-based resettlement;
- From joblessness to reemployment;

- From homelessness to house reconstruction;
- From marginalization to social inclusion;
- From increased morbidity to improved health care;
- From food insecurity to adequate nutrition;
- From loss of access to restoration of community assets and services; and
- From social disarticulation to networks and community rebuilding.

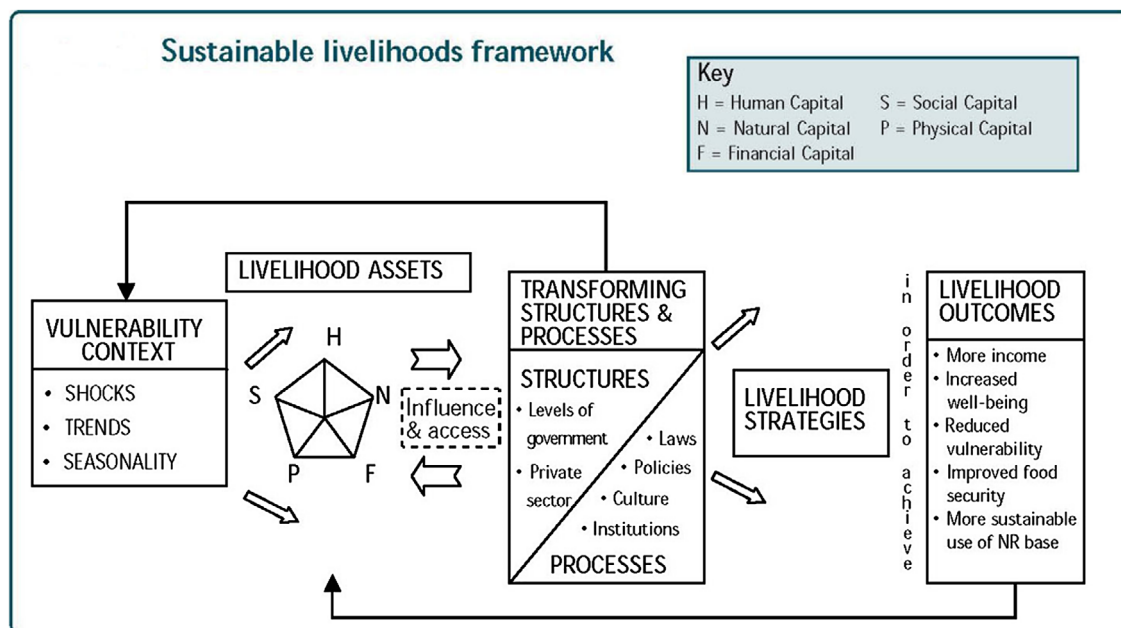
The language of the IRR is direct and understood by all stakeholders, enabling them to participate in the negotiation and implementation of mitigation strategies for these risks. A key strength of the IRR is that it puts forward the known risks of projects and proposes a methodology for mitigation by anticipating these risks up-front. We believe that the IRR's strength as an accessible and practical approach to identify resettlement impacts can be incorporated into a broader project-wide framework to identify all social risks associated with projects in a way that can be openly discussed and promoted by all project stakeholders.

The main advantage of the IRR framework is its simplicity. However, it is focused solely on the impacts from resettlement and is not used to capture the broader social impacts (positive and negative) of the project as a whole. It is difficult for projects to use the IRR framework with impacted communities because it presents a highly negative picture of the impacts and thus the project at the same time as the company is trying to convince project stakeholders to accept the project. What is therefore needed is a framework that can capture all project impacts while providing a neutral space for all stakeholders to contribute their views on project implementation. We believe we have provided this in our Social Framework.

### **Sustainable livelihoods approach**

The SLA gained hold in the 1990s as a way to go beyond the limitations of single-sector strategies in attempts to solve complex rural development problems, and to try to create an understanding of things from the perspective of local people (Solesbury 2003; Scoones 2009). Building on Sen's Capability Approach and the concept of sustainable development – which became prominent with the Brundtland report (WCED 1987) and the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro – Chambers and Conway (1991) produced a discussion paper which became the conceptual basis of the SLA. However, many of the ideas underpinning the approach had been floating around for decades previously (Scoones 2009) and were particularly evident in the writings of Robert Chambers (e.g. Chambers 1983). Oxfam, CARE and UNDP started to use the approach in their work through the 1990s (Solesbury 2003). However, it was a change of government in the United Kingdom in May 1997 (with





**Figure 1.** The sustainable livelihoods framework. Source: DfID (1999–2001).

the election of the Blair Labour government) that led to major changes in policy, thinking and funding priorities, and to the establishment of the UK Department for International Development (DfID). In November 1997, the UK Government published a White Paper which committed to sustainable development and to creating sustainable livelihoods for poor people (UK Secretary of State for International Development 1997). DfID funded research and development actions that promoted sustainable rural livelihoods. DfID staff, researchers at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex, as well as staff of many humanitarian organisations began to vigorously discuss and experiment with models that might lead to sustainable rural livelihoods. Many of them, as well as others around the world (e.g. Bebbington 1999), were strongly influenced by Amartya Sen's work. A flurry of papers was produced, with some key synthesis documents being Scoones (1998), Ashley and Carney (1999), Carney et al. (1999), Carney (2002) and Hussein (2002). From 1999 to 2001, DfID published a set of *Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets* (DfID 1999–2001) which codified the approach, and a website, Livelihoods Connect, was supported (maintained by IDS) for some time.

This was an exciting time, with enthusiasm and commitment from a new group of people with often a quite radical vision, and a government seemingly committed to doing something about it. This was not the old world of natural resources specialists (archetypically concerned with soils not people) and economists (with their interest in growth and trickle down), but a new, integrated perspective centred on normative, political commitments to banish poverty. (Scoones 2009, p. 178)

The essence of the SLA is, of course, the concept of a sustainable livelihood. Rewording Chambers and

Conway (1991) slightly, Scoones (1998:5) considered that:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base.

The SLA has 5 main components (see Figure 1). A vulnerability context depicts the situation in which people are living, especially the extent of their vulnerability to risks, shocks, trends and seasonal changes. The 5 capitals or 'asset pentagon' (social, natural, financial, physical and human capital) is used to assess people's overall asset base or resources. Transforming structures and processes are considered to shape people's access to assets and livelihood activities, as well as framing the vulnerability context in which they live. Livelihood strategies are the ways people use the 5 capital assets to generate the desired livelihood outcomes. The idea of the SLA is that any development project should consider how it affects or interacts with how a community functions.

In its simplest form, the framework views people as operating in a context of vulnerability. Within this context, they have access to certain assets or poverty reducing factors. These gain their meaning and value through the prevailing social, institutional and organisational environment. This environment also influences the livelihood strategies – ways of combining and using assets – that are open to people in pursuit of beneficial livelihood outcomes that meet their own livelihood objectives. (DfID 1999–2001, no page)

Although DfID had invested heavily in the development and application of the SLA framework, and the SLA was being used in many fields of application, including livestock, fisheries, forestry, agriculture, health

and urban development, from about 2003 the SLA was dropped by DfID and other organisations because of its complexity and other limitations (Moser & Dani 2008), and because of other government priorities including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Clark & Carney 2008). By then, various detractors had emerged (e.g. Arce 2003; Brocklesby & Fisher 2003), and there were squabbles within DfID over the allocation of funding, all of which gave the government sufficient pretext to make changes (Clark & Carney 2008; Morse et al. 2009; Morse & McNamara 2013).

Although DfID has abandoned the SLA framework, there remains some interest in it around the world (e.g. Korf & Oughton 2006; Benson & Twigg 2007; Davies et al. 2008; Gutierrez-Montes et al. 2009; Tao & Wall 2009; Valdés-Rodríguez & Pérez-Vázquez 2011; Nel 2015). Some international NGOs continue to use various adaptations of the SLA framework (e.g. Oxfam Cymru 2013). Various other scholars have developed SLA-like approaches (e.g. Beckley et al. 2008), sometimes with more categories of capitals (e.g. Emery & Flora 2006). The SLA in various guises has been used in a number of resource development projects with the capitals used for planning baseline studies (e.g. Coakes & Sadler 2011). It also continues to attract critiques (Small 2007; de Haan 2012; Morse & McNamara 2013; McLean 2015).

In our opinion, one of the main problems with the SLA is its complexity and alienating language. The language of 'capitals' simply does not resonate with communities. Practitioners attempting to use the SLA have had to go to great lengths to try to explain to community and industry stakeholders what was meant, and it was still not understood. The five capitals – or 'pentagon prison' as McLean (2015) called it – were too restrictive, with many facets of life not easily fitting into them. The other components of the model were also too difficult for most people to comprehend. At best, the SLA conceptual diagram was a useful behind-the-scenes model to help practitioners, but it was too scary for community and project staff. More critically, its focus on livelihoods alone was too limiting. While livelihoods are important, there are other important dimensions to people's lives and well-being. The Social Framework thus goes beyond livelihoods to discuss all aspects of people's lives and their well-being.

### **Asset-based approaches and frameworks**

There are a range of approaches that revolve around the use of community assets (Moser & Dani 2008) or community capitals (Porritt 2005; Emery & Flora 2006), some of which acknowledge a specific link to SLA. Perhaps the most established of these is ABCD (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993a, 1993b, 2005; Mathie & Cunningham 2003). ABCD and/or its variants have been advocated in development circles (e.g. Attanasio & Szekely 2001;

Yeneabat & Butterfield 2012) and are frequently included in introductory textbooks about community development (e.g. Phillips & Pittman 2009). These frameworks tend to focus on Sen's concept of capabilities, and consider that assets are not only the resources that people use to build livelihoods but are also the qualities that give them the capability to act (Bebbington 1999). Thus, the more assets people have the less vulnerable they are. Conversely, the greater the erosion of people's assets, the greater their vulnerability and associated insecurity (Moser 1998).

ABCD focuses on local community assets and the determination of priorities according to the real or perceived strengths of the community by the community members themselves. It is a strengths-based approach focusing on what the community already has and where they want to go, which is established in a visioning process undertaken by the local community. The ABCD approach does not define a singular specific framework, but allows the community to identify their strengths as they see them. Thus, it is not restricted to identifying the resources that have a direct or immediately recognizable economic value. The strengths are generally identified through a process of storytelling around the positive features of the community. Owen and Kemp (2012) proposed that the ABCD approach could be used to facilitate participatory planning in projects.

Although the ABCD approach is meant to be community-driven, in practice it requires external facilitation (Chirisa 2009). The absence of a structuring framework is likely to result in the process being influenced to some extent by the personal interests of these facilitators. We consider our Social Framework complements the ABCD approach by providing an initial framework to identify and categorize the important social factors according to community priorities.

### **Summary critique of the key ideas**

In our opinion, the SLA tries to condense too many social factors into too few categories. Because of its complexity, it tends to be a top-down process of assessment. In contrast, the ABCD approach is participatory and seeks to use people's own views about the assets in their local context, but these processes lack an adequate guiding framework and generally need external facilitation. In the context of a large project being developed quickly, there is a need to get local communities to communicate the social factors that contribute to their well-being and to consider how these will be impacted. The timeframes for the development of plans are generally very short and, while the specialists strive to use participatory methods, it can be difficult for the project's community stakeholders to play a meaningful role in the development of the plans. An advantage of Cernea's IRR framework is its simplicity, however, the IRR is focused

solely on the resettlement impacts of projects and is not used to capture the social impacts of the project as a whole, especially the positive impacts. It is also difficult for projects to use the IRR framework with impacted communities because it presents such a negative picture of the potential impacts at the same time as the company is trying to convince project stakeholders to accept the project. With all these problems of existing models, clearly a new model is needed, in both theoretical and practical terms.

## Criterion 2: Be human rights compatible

With the [United Nations \(2011\)](#) endorsement of the *United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, there has been a growing awareness of the human rights responsibilities of companies and projects (Vanclay et al. [2015](#)). Many guidance documents have subsequently been produced outlining what companies need to know and do to respect human rights (e.g. [ICMM 2012](#); [DIHR & IPIECA 2013](#); [Rio Tinto 2013](#)). With other papers discussing the human rights aspects of resettlement and/or projects (e.g. [Kemp & Vanclay 2013](#); [van der Ploeg et al., 2017](#); [van der Ploeg & Vanclay 2017](#)) and/or outlining the human rights based approach ([Frankovits 2006](#); [Götzmann et al. 2016](#)), it is not necessary to give an elaborate treatment here. Thus, below we very briefly summarize the key human rights declarations and various guidance documents.

Basically, human rights are commonly understood as being inalienable fundamental rights to which people are inherently entitled simply because they are human ([UN OHCHR 2016](#)). They are widely accepted as being generally agreed values and should be respected to ensure human dignity and the fulfilment of basic human needs for all. Human rights are regarded as being: universal and inalienable; interrelated, interdependent and indivisible; and all human rights are regarded as being equal in status, and all must be equally observed. The equality and non-discrimination of all people, participation and inclusion, and accountability and transparency constitute the key principles underpinning a human rights-based approach ([UN OHCHR 2016](#)). Full observance of the non-discrimination criterion means recognizing that certain groups of rights holders, especially vulnerable people, women, children, Indigenous peoples, and other marginalised groups, must be accorded special attention so that they are able to enjoy their human rights to the same extent as other people.

There is a wide range of human rights. With established human rights to adequate housing, health, food, water, a safe and clean environment, to practise one's culture and religion, to have a family life, as well as the many others, arguably all dimensions of life are covered by one or more human rights. It is therefore likely that all social and environmental impacts will translate into one

or more human rights ([Götzmann et al. 2016](#)). The Social Framework provides a tool to enable all impacts (including human rights) to be described and communicated with all stakeholders in a manner they can understand.

The human rights based approach expects that rights holders can claim their rights. This means that they must be informed about their rights, and know what avenues of redress are available to them. Ensuring that human rights are upheld and that people know and can claim their rights are primarily the duties of government. However, companies have a role to play firstly by not violating the human rights of their affected communities, by contributing to the rights awareness of their neighbouring communities, and by providing mechanisms for redress. The Social Framework acknowledges that respect for human rights is part of the responsibilities of companies and projects. The Framework assists in the assessment of human rights impacts by providing a way of understanding how projects affect people.

## Criterion 3: Align with key international standards and best practice

Our Social Framework must address the social issues that are required to be considered by the key international standards and best practice expectations that may apply to large projects. Typically these are the World Bank's social safeguards, the IFC performance standards, and the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). Many other international financial institutions (e.g. the other multilateral development banks) have their own standards, but in general they are not largely different to the principles in the IFC's performance standards. Over the years, there has been a process of harmonization in the standards and it is reasonable to regard the IFC's performance standards as indicative ([Price 2015](#); [Vanclay et al. 2015](#)).

The IFC's Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability ([IFC 2012a](#)) have become globally recognized good practice in dealing with environmental and social risk management ([Reddy et al. 2015](#)). Their implementation in the Equator Principles, which have been adopted by over 80 leading banks accounting for over 70% of international project finance debt in emerging markets, has further embedded the IFC performance standards as the 'gold standard' guiding project development ([Vanclay et al. 2015](#)). The Performance Standards are supported by Guidance Notes ([IFC 2012b](#)) as well as a range of manuals on key topics such as resettlement ([IFC 2002](#)), stakeholder engagement ([IFC 2007, 2014](#)), participatory monitoring ([IFC 2010a](#)), in-migration ([2009a](#)), grievance mechanisms ([IFC 2009b](#)), cumulative impacts ([IFC 2013](#)), local procurement ([IFC 2011](#)), and strategic community investment ([IFC 2010b](#)).

Essentially, the IFC Performance Standards require that projects identify all environmental and social risks to





Figure 2. Sustainable development goals. Source: UN (2015).

affected communities. PS1 is an overarching document specifying general issues, for example that any impacts must be addressed consistent with the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, minimise, compensate or offset). All risks must be addressed in an environmental and social management system, and there must be a commitment to continuous improvement. Stakeholder engagement is essential throughout the process. PS2 is concerned with fair working conditions. PS3 addresses pollution created by the project, and the resources (e.g. water) used. PS4 highlights health and safety issues of the affected community. PS5 addresses land acquisition, resettlement and displacement. PS6 is concerned with biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource use. PS7 specifically discusses Indigenous Peoples, and PS8 deal with cultural heritage. All of these topics are addressed in the Social Framework.

An issue worthy of particular mention is FPIC, which was highlighted in the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Although in the IFC Performance Standards FPIC is only required in certain circumstances, international best practice would generally expect that the principle of FPIC should be observed wherever Indigenous peoples are present, whether or not they are formally recognised (Hanna & Vanclay 2013; Rodhouse & Vanclay 2016). The concept of FPIC is that affected communities should be involved in decision-making about any project that will affect their lives, and that the project should only proceed when the clear approval (consent) of the community has been given (Buxton & Wilson 2013; Vanclay et al. 2015). To be valid, such approval would need to be given free of any intimidation, and on the basis of full information and understanding about the project (informed). The time-frame in seeking this consent must be well in advance of (prior to) the project, and with sufficient time for the

affected community to make its own enquiries and conduct its own internal decision-making process. FPIC is an important principle to observe because of the special connection Indigenous peoples have with their traditional territories (Anaya 2004, 2005).

Our Social Framework is an excellent tool for affected communities to use to enable them to consider what a project will mean for them. When used in conjunction with the IFC Performance Standards, it provides an effective way of ensuring compliance with the intent of these standards. Documentation that comes from using the Social Framework could assist a proponent in proving in the future that any support it claimed it had from local communities was based on their informed understanding of the issues.

#### **Criterion 4: Help meet widely desired social outcomes (e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals)**

At the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which included a set of 17 SDGs related to ending poverty, fighting inequality and injustice, and tackling climate change (United Nations 2015) (see Figure 2). The SDGs build on the previous MDGs that were adopted in 2000, and which achieved considerable progress in reducing poverty, hunger, disease, gender inequality and unequal access to water and sanitation. The new SDGs, and the broader sustainability agenda, go further than the MDGs in addressing the root causes of poverty and in considering the universal need for development. The targets under each of the SDGs seek to end extreme poverty in all its forms by 2030.

Many projects give a general commitment to the SDGs without adopting any clear strategy to achieve progress towards these goals. Meeting these goals will mean that projects will have to go much further than has been previously required by the IFC's performance standards in demonstrating that they have improved (rather than only restored) people's livelihoods. Our Social Framework assists in this by providing a simple model that captures the broad range of social dimensions that contribute to improved well-being.

### Criterion 5: Be participatory and practical

The international social and environmental standards all require the 'meaningful' participation of impacted stakeholders in the projects that will impact on their lives. However, environmental and social specialists tend to use jargon which is not easily understood by the public, which has the effect of creating barriers to their participation. Although most projects claim to undertake some form of a 'participatory' planning process, in reality documentation and specialist plans are generally long and terse documents, with extensive lists, many tables of impacts and mitigation measures, and containing jargon that is difficult for non-technical people to understand. Real participation by all stakeholders requires more than what has generally been provided in the past – it requires effective procedures for engagement and the use of language and diagrams that can be easily understood. It also requires ethical professional practice (Vanclay et al. 2013).

We share the sentiment in the saying typically attributed to Albert Einstein that, if you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough. In the book, *Simple*, Siegel and Etzkorn (2013) propose that the simplification of messages requires a thorough commitment by an organization to empathize, distil and clarify. Empathy requires the project staff to fully understand the situation of the impacted stakeholders, in effect to place themselves in the other's position (to 'stand in their shoes'), in order to anticipate how the messages will be perceived. Distil is to present the information in a way that does not overwhelm the recipient, to get to the essence of the information. To achieve clarity, the project must organize, emphasize and visualize the design of the information in plain language that can be understood by all stakeholders. The Social Framework seeks to empathize with project stakeholders, to simplify the social assessment and management process by distilling the complexity down into plain language, and to provide clarity in what the project is trying to achieve.

It is often difficult for impacted communities to articulate and communicate the intricacy of the environmental and social issues that are most important to them and to influence project management plans. This is especially the case when each specialist uses their own jargon and methodology, and there is not a consistent or coherent

framework by which the various specialists engage with the communities.

The environmental and social complexity of large projects makes it difficult for practitioners to identify and measure all impacts of the project simultaneously. Experts are typically specialized in only one or two key areas, and can have many 'blind spots', meaning that they may miss key project impacts. The suite of management plans in projects is ever increasing, requiring the involvement of more and more-specialized experts in a wide range and growing number of areas including culture, health, Indigenous peoples, ecosystems services, biodiversity, resettlement, livelihood restoration, community development, stakeholder engagement, human rights, mine closure, local employment and procurement, etc. The involvement of so many specialists makes the whole process of assessing, planning and managing the social and environmental impacts very difficult to coordinate. In many cases, this may result in duplication of data collection or stakeholder engagement, potentially creating overlap or contradiction in terms of recommendations for mitigation measures, and so on. Our Social Framework facilitates the sharing of information amongst the experts and between the experts and different stakeholders. It also enables coordination to reduce duplication of data collection.

### The Social Framework for Projects

Reflecting on the limitations of existing models, especially their inaccessibility, lack of true participatory engagement, and limited ability to be implemented in a real project context, it is clear that a new model or framework is needed. By (1) building on existing models, (2) being compatible with human rights requirements, (3) aligning with international standards and best practice, (4) bearing in mind the SDGs, (5) being participatory and practical, as well as reflecting on our practical experience in large projects, we developed the Social Framework for Projects. The Social Framework is consistent with current understandings in the field of SIA (Vanclay 2002, 2003, 2012; Esteves & Vanclay 2009; Esteves et al. 2012; Vanclay et al. 2015; Mathur 2016) and can be seen as an overarching framework for SIA.

Kirchherr and Charles (2016, pp. 106, 107) argue that

Frameworks matter ... the results of a scholarly analysis are significantly interlinked with and frequently the direct result of the framework employed. The framework provides the perspective on the question at hand; it determines which components and dimensions of social impact to investigate – and which to exclude.

They argue that a framework should consider space, time and value dimensions. Our Social Framework does that. It can be applied at local, regional, national and international levels. It can be applied at all stages of the project cycle. And it considers both positive and negative impacts.



**Figure 3.** The Social Framework for Projects (simple version).

The Social Framework has been applied in several real projects and was adapted in response to our own assessment and the feedback of project partners and community stakeholders. Commercial considerations mean that it is not appropriate to reveal exact details, although we can say that the Social Framework has been used to plan complex resettlement projects and manage in-migration issues in several countries in Africa and Latin America. The Framework has been discussed with colleagues and presented at various conferences and seminars all over the world, with all feedback progressively improving it (see our Acknowledgements).

The Social Framework as presented in Figure 3 represents a simple conceptual model for highlighting the social issues that contribute to people's well-being and that are impacted by large projects. At the core of the Framework is people's well-being. Individuals are used as the primary unit of analysis in recognition of the fact that there is considerable inequality within households and communities, and that it is important to understand how some people are more vulnerable to project impacts than others. The Framework also acknowledges that individuals typically live within families and communities, and that there is co-dependence between these different social layers. We consider that 'wellbeing' is an all-encompassing notion that includes having one's basic human needs met (e.g. adequate food and water), being in good mental and physical health, having the ability to pursue one's goals and to thrive, feeling connected to and a part of one's local community and locality, and a general feeling of being satisfied with life (adapted from OECD 2011; Alkire 2002b). Impacts to well-being can occur at local, national and even international levels. Changes to our local environment can have a very direct impact on our well-being, but changes at distant locations can also have an impact when they affect the things we care about. For example, a project that causes the loss of habitat of an endangered species, the destruction of

natural or cultural heritage, or threatens highly significant ecosystems, can reduce our well-being even if they take place on the other side of the world.

The Social Framework encompasses everything that needs to be considered in projects, including what people value about their current situation, their aspirations and expectations, the likely project impacts, project planning issues, and potential mitigation and enhancement measures. Because there are so many issues that need to be considered, which interconnect and overlap, and because they vary according to local contextual issues, we have grouped them into eight key categories, described in detail below. These categories were derived from the authors' experiences with several complex resettlement projects across the world (e.g. ICMM 2015). An infographic of the Social Framework elaborating each of the categories is presented in Figure 4.

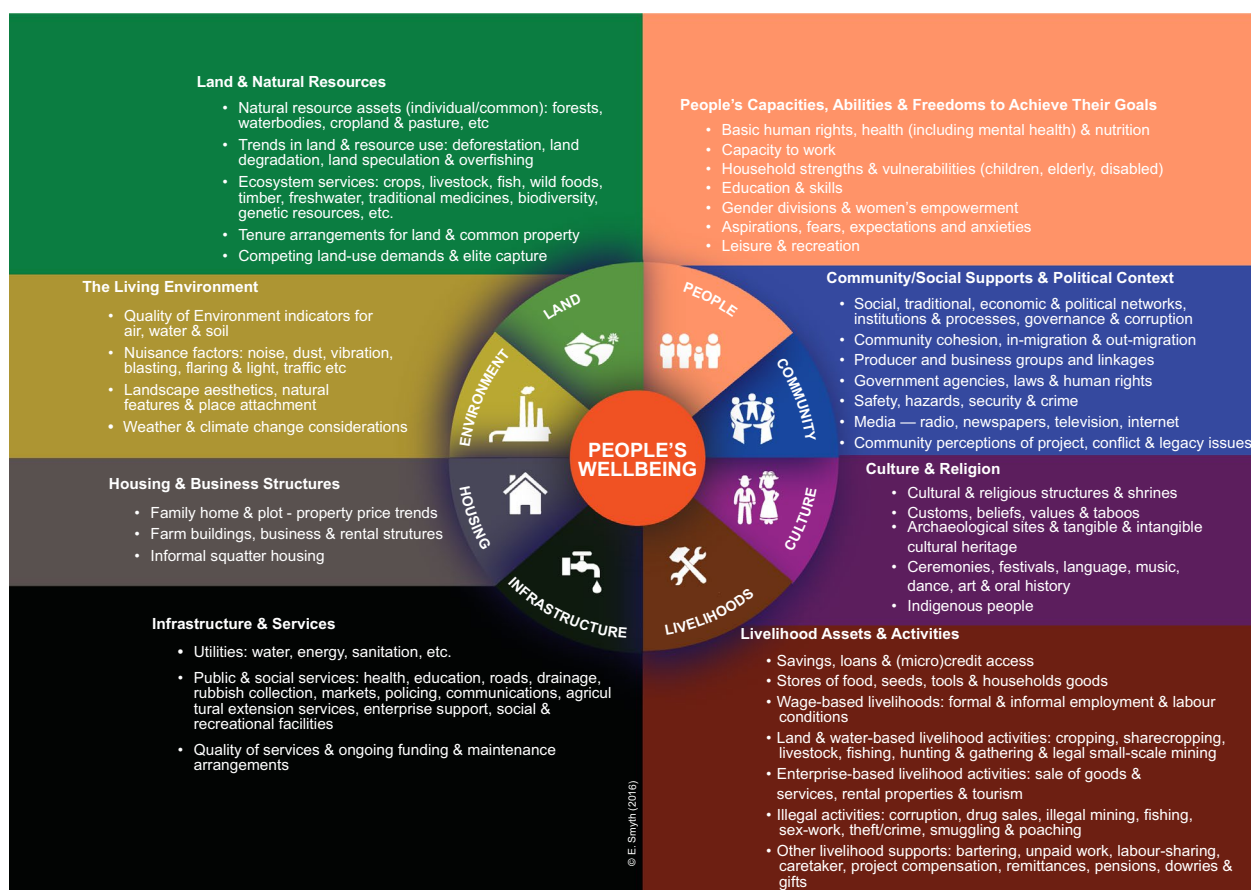
### ***People's capacities, abilities and freedoms to achieve their goals***

The basic human rights, including health and nutrition of the family, are the most fundamental needs to achieve a minimum level of well-being. The capacity of individuals to work inside and outside the household, their education and skills, all contribute to how a household can exploit the livelihood resources available to it. Households with limited labour availability (e.g. children, the elderly and sick) will be more vulnerable to project impacts and require special support. Women are often limited in their freedom to fully engage in livelihood and community activities due to cultural constraints. Projects can affect people's aspirations and create fears and expectations about their future that may induce stress.

### ***Community/social supports and political context***

The household is generally part of a community, however it also exists in a social and political setting and is dependent on a combination of family, community, traditional and political networks, institutions and processes to gain access to land, housing, and livelihood resources. Communities are often divided and therefore it is very important to understand the 'politics of the project', as projects bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, each with their own agenda(s). If these agendas are not acknowledged, then it will be difficult to understand the true impacts of the project and the measures that might mitigate them. Understanding the drivers of in-migration and out-migration is necessary to analyse the changing context and consequent effects on community cohesion. The extent and perception of safety and security in a community are key well-being indicators, and important in terms of whether people feel free to go about their daily lives. Having a free media and freedom of speech may determine whether meaningful





**Figure 4.** The Social Framework for Projects (elaborated version).

consultation can take place. A community's past experience with projects and any legacy issues will also affect support for new developments.

### **Culture and religion**

All societies have a shared belief system (of sorts) that frames their existence and provides psychological security. Religion and culture are important to the identity of a community and provide a basis by which households engage with and support each other. They provide insight into what the community considers important. Some societies have strong attachments to certain religious structures and shrines which need to be considered in project planning. Tangible cultural heritage (e.g. archaeological sites) can also be affected by project developments. Intangible cultural heritage (e.g. language, oral history, music, dance and art) can be lost as a result of the social changes that accompany development. Indigenous people have a particularly strong attachment to their culture, which should be protected in accordance with their wishes.

### **Livelihood assets and activities**

A household's stock of assets, including savings, food reserves and household goods, affects its resilience to shocks such as political instability or adverse weather.

People depend on a wide range of livelihood activities to support their families, including land and water based, enterprise based, and wage based. The labour conditions under which people undertake livelihood activities are also an important contributor to well-being. People may have supplementary livelihood supports such as project compensation, savings, access to credit, rental income, remittances, or pensions. Knowing what these are is necessary in order to restore livelihoods affected by the project. There is a vast array of informal and illegal activities, including corruption, drugs, illegal artisanal mining, sex workers, theft/crime, and smuggling, which also needs to be understood as these play a role in the local economic, political and security context.

### **Infrastructure and services**

People's access to basic infrastructure and services such as healthcare, water and sanitation, energy, and social welfare is critical in determining their physical and mental well-being. Their further development and ability to exploit livelihood opportunities depends on access to education, communications, transport, agriculture and enterprise support, markets etc. The quality of both the physical infrastructure and the human resources needed to provide these services is important. Negotiating who is responsible for providing and maintaining the quality of services and infrastructure is necessary.



### ***Housing and business structures***

Having a house to live in is the most basic requirement of any household. The quality of buildings can have a big impact on the well-being of a family. Business and farm structures are necessary for conducting livelihood activities. Some households earn an income from rental properties which also needs to be considered. Informal housing – i.e. where people build structures on land they don't own, or situations in which people are squatting – present particular challenges.

### ***The living environment***

Households and communities need a stable and clean environment in order to maintain their well-being. Any deterioration to the air, water or other quality of environment indicators can impact negatively on people's physical and mental health. Project impacts such as noise, dust, vibration, pollution, light, traffic detract from people's well-being. Aesthetic impacts, e.g. in terms of changes in the landscape, are also important, especially in relation to people's place attachment. Another dimension of the living environment is the way in which people rely on the weather for their livelihoods, for example, on seasonal rainfall. The impact of extreme weather events or longer term changes in the climate can have fundamental impacts on people's livelihoods. Projects need to understand the likelihood of extreme weather events and climate change and support the construction of housing and the development of livelihoods that can adapt to these changes.

### ***Land and natural resources***

Access to land, water bodies, forests and other natural resources is necessary for conducting many livelihood activities. Such access is governed by community, traditional and political institutions, and secure tenure provides stability to enable investment and development. An in-depth understanding of land tenure arrangements that captures all the interests and competing demands relating to land ownership and land use is critical to the land acquisition process in order to minimize disputes, opportunities for elite capture and project delays. Projects can impact on access to land and natural resources, and the ecosystem services they provide, including crops, livestock, fish, wildfood, timber, fresh-water, medicinal plants, biodiversity, etc.

### ***How the Social Framework can be used in practice***

The Social Framework can be used as an overarching conceptual model to assist in ensuring all key issues are considered. It can also be used as a simple diagram, infographic or template to discuss the nature of

the social issues created by a project with each stakeholder group (e.g. the affected communities, NGOs, clients). Furthermore, it can be used during the scoping process to enable each stakeholder group to identify what they consider is important. Each of the various social specialists in a project (e.g. social, health, ecosystem services, human rights, resettlement) can use the Social Framework to present their understandings of the positive and negative impacts of the project and their proposed mitigation measures. These perspectives can be combined into a single Master Social Framework to be discussed with all key stakeholders enabling prioritization of the issues. The Framework can also be used to present the project commitments to community development.

The advantage of the Social Framework as a communication tool is that its simple language is equally accessible to community leaders, project management staff and specialist environmental and social consultants. The Social Framework is also an analytical tool that can ensure that impacts on all the main social components are considered. It can also be a starting point for the development of a mind map for any project which can be used to understand and represent the local context. The Social Framework can be used through all project phases (i.e. from scoping to closure) to engage all stakeholders in dialogue about the key issues that need to be considered and managed. The Social Framework can also be used to develop criteria for a wide range of assessments including resettlement house design and resettlement site selection (presented below).

### ***An example of the practical application of the Social Framework for Projects: resettlement site selection***

Here we provide an example of the Social Framework applied to the selection of resettlement sites for displaced communities. In presenting this example, we hope to show how practical and versatile the Framework is, and how comprehensive it can be. The selection of a resettlement site (or sites) is perhaps the most critical step in the resettlement process, but is often narrowly focused on one or a few key criteria, typically proximity to the nearest town. However, this can compromise the ability of the resettled households to adequately restore their livelihoods, for example because of their limited access to alternative farmland or the necessary natural resources. The Social Framework can be used to assist in the identification of appropriate site selection criteria and in the prioritization of multiple criteria. For example, in addition to criteria addressing the social and environmental dimensions that contribute to people's well-being and/or that are important to community stakeholders, the Social Framework can also include important project criteria such as cost and schedule.



**Figure 5.** Output from a workshoping process relating to resettlement site selection criteria.

By undertaking the following procedure in conjunction with all stakeholders, the selection criteria can be identified and agreement reached on resettlement site preferences. The Social Framework is an integral part of this process of identifying the issues, and coming to a shared agreement.

A workshop with each key stakeholder group (e.g. impacted community and subgroups, potential host communities, civil society, project development team and government) is conducted using the Social Framework to generate the criteria used to guide the site selection process. This exercise is led by experienced facilitators who may be from the community, civil society, government agencies or consultants hired by the company. It is critical that the facilitator does not have pre-conceived ideas about where the resettlement sites should be located, and they should act as a neutral player to facilitate discussion and decision-making. The simple version of the Social Framework (Figure 3) is presented to the workshop typically on a large sheet of paper. It is introduced as a tool to facilitate discussion in the workshops, especially to ensure that all important dimensions are considered. The eight social categories act as triggers of possible community needs (i.e. criteria). Ultimately, use of the Framework helps capture and prioritize the criteria.

For the workshops, it is recommended that the members of the community to be resettled are grouped into relatively homogenous sub-groups – e.g. adult males, women, youth, the elderly, and potentially different income and ethnic groups – so that the individuals in each sub-group have an opportunity to freely express their individual preferences. Different groups within a

community can have very different preferences about resettlements sites and hence the criteria for selection, and sometimes their participation may need to be across different workshops. For example, older men might prioritize a site with replacement agricultural land for continued farming, women might favour a site close to urban centres for trading, and young people might prefer a site which is located close to the project for employment. These different views are recorded, and a discussion held about these differences.

At the beginning of the workshop, the Social Framework is briefly introduced. When all workshop participants comprehend the diagram, they are asked the question: *What are the most important features a new resettlement site should have to meet the future needs of your community?* This question is discussed in each small group, with each group recording its views on paper.

The Social Framework is used to guide the group in their discussion so that they consider as wide a range of criteria as possible. Once the criteria are listed, the sub-group then discusses them and ranks them in terms of importance. The groups can also suggest their initial ideas for potential resettlement sites. Each sub-group presents their prioritized criteria to a plenary session, with all nominated key criteria being recorded on a combined Social Framework poster (see Figure 5). When all groups have had their turn, the workshop as a whole is asked to reach consensus on the top 5 or 10 criteria they consider priorities. It is important that additional public meetings are held to present and explain the final chosen resettlement site criteria so that all community members get a chance to provide feedback on the process.

## Conclusion

Despite increased interest in international social standards and an increasing number of commitments to achieve the new SDGs worldwide, many projects continue to have negative impacts on the well-being of affected individuals and communities. Unfortunately, complex development projects typically fail to address their social impacts, and certainly in a holistic way. Despite the various requirements and/or exhortations for participatory processes to be used in the conduct of Environmental and SIA and in the implementation of Environmental and Social Management Systems, communities often struggle to understand and/or contribute meaningfully to these processes. Existing frameworks have generally not been useful in developing a comprehensive understanding of the social impacts of projects. The Social Framework presented in this paper is a conceptual model that explains the various environmental and social factors contributing to people's well-being, a practical methodology, and a communications tool to ensure that the process of mitigating the social impacts of large projects is accessible to all stakeholders. By addressing all the factors that affect peoples' well-being, the Social Framework supports projects to go beyond the simple restoration of livelihoods to ensuring the full recovery of people's well-being on an ongoing basis.

Using the key topic areas that align with the social management frameworks required by international standards, the simple version of the Social Framework is a useful starting point for any project to map out its local context. The language of the Framework is simple and accessible allowing communities to use it independently. At the same time, the Framework can be used by all social specialists – including health, ecosystems services, in-migration, etc. – as an overarching framework for SIA to communicate on a single page with all stakeholders. This helps to facilitate discussion on aligning proposed mitigation measures amongst these experts, thus avoiding duplication. The Framework can be used to support all phases of project development, including scoping, baseline data collection, SIA, the development of management plans, the formulation of monitoring indicators, and to design social reviews. The Social Framework provides social practitioners with an opportunity to move beyond the rhetoric of stakeholder participation by providing a tool which can be used and adapted by both experts and the community themselves to communicate what they understand contributing to their well-being and how projects can reach their full potential as a development opportunity.

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## ORCID

Eddie Smyth  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7077-2220>

Frank Vanclay  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9945-6432>

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